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Source: *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 24, No. 94 (Jun., 1935), pp. 177-188

Published by: Irish Province of the Society of Jesus

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30097194>

Accessed: 18-05-2016 09:55 UTC

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ALFRED ROSENBERG AS GERMAN PROPHET

BY JOHN J. COYNE, S.J.

ONLY faint echoes reach us here in Ireland of the great spiritual struggle that is being waged to-day in Nazi Germany. Supporting the National Socialist revolution and its Nordic outlook a national religion based on race and blood is being energetically championed by restless spirits. The part played in their weird programme by a book of Dr. Alfred Rosenberg, supervisor since January 1934 of intellectual training in Germany, forms the subject of these pages.

Rosenberg, the author of *Der Mythos des XX. Jahrhunderts* (*The Myth of the 20th Century*), is one of those men whom the political revolution of Hitlerite Germany has thrown up to the surface and made emerge to prominence in the movement. Born on 12th January 1893, at Reval in Esthonia, where he completed his secondary education, he studied architecture in the Technical High School at Riga, and at Moscow, whither the school had to be transferred owing to the Great War. After securing the diploma in engineering and architecture, he returned to Reval shortly before the German army entered that city in January 1918. He offered himself to the Germans as a volunteer, but was not accepted owing to his status as a foreigner in an occupied territory. He remained in Reval over the summer of 1918 as drawing master in the Gustavus-Adolfus gymnasium. The day preceding the declaration of the Esthonian Republic he delivered himself of a heated harangue against Jews and Bolsheviki, and then set out for Munich, where on 8th April, 1919, the date of the foundation of the short-lived Bavarian Republic of Soviets, he just escaped arrest by the red-guard after he had been speaking in public for twenty minutes in denunciation of the Jews and Marxists. In that same year he made the acquaintance of Hitler and soon joined his party, and in 1921, in conjunction with Dietrich Eckart, took over the management of the *Voelkischer Beobachter*, the party organ

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of the Nazis to this day, sharing with Hitler the vicissitudes and dangers attendant on the formation of the N. S. D. A. P. (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter-Partei). Not till February 1923 did Rosenberg receive his status as a German citizen. In addition to his work as manager of the Munich daily, he has to his credit a number of books that show him the outspoken and fanatical enemy of the Jewish race and the Christian religion, as well as the enthusiastic prophet of the Nazi regime. The chief works of this prolific writer are the following :—*Die Spur der Juden im Wandel der Zeit* ; *Das Verbrechen der Freimaurerei* ; *Houston S. Chamberlain als Verkuender und Begruender einer deutschen Zukunft* ; *Wesen, Grundsätze und Ziele der N. S. D. A. P.* ; *Der Zukunftsweg einer deutschen Aussenpolitik* ; *Der Mythos des 20 Jahrhunderts* ; *Blut und Ehre*.

The best known and most notorious of these is the *Myth of the 20th Century*, which first appeared in February 1930—though, as the author tells us in the preface, its main ideas were already worked out in 1917. The third edition of this book appeared in October 1931 ; in May 1934, 150,000 copies had already been printed. The latest reprint, which is dated January 1935, and to which we refer in these pages, is the 51-52 edition and brings the number of copies to 263,000. The work is dedicated “To the memory of the two million German heroes who fell in the world-war for a German life and a German kingdom of honour and freedom.” It is fast becoming the inspired book of Nazi Germany ; its teachings are moulding the spirit and practice of the age. It was placed on the Index of prohibited books by the Supreme Congregation of the Holy Office on February 7, 1934. In the words of the decree of condemnation “this book spurns and utterly rejects all the dogmas of the Catholic Church and indeed the foundations of the Christian religion itself. It upholds the need of instituting a new religion or German church, and formulates the principle that to-day a new mythical faith is arising, a mythical faith of blood based on the belief that the divine nature of man can be defended by a faith founded on the most exact science”

The *Mythus* is divided into three books : (i) *The Struggle of Values*, divided into three chief sections : Race and Soul of the Race, Love and Honour, Mysticism and Action ; (ii) *The Essence of German Art*, divided into Racial Ideal of Beauty, Will and Impulse, Subjective and Objective Style, The Aesthetic Will ; (iii) *The Coming Reich*, divided into Myth and Type, State and Sexes, People and State, Nordic-German Law, Popular Church and School in Germany, New State-System, Unity of Being.

To appreciate the leading ideas running through this work of 700 pages it will first be necessary to recall briefly the racial theories of two forerunners of Rosenberg, neither of whom, strange to say, was German : we refer to the French diplomat Count Gobineau and the Englishman Houston Stewart Chamberlain. In his *Essai sur l'Inégalité des Races humaines* (1852) Gobineau allots the pride of place, among the white races, to the Aryans, those fair-haired, blue-eyed men of inventive power and talent in governing, who in the misty past spread from India to northern Europe. An offshoot of one of the Aryan branches, the Suevi, invaded Gaul under Ariovistus and were vanquished by Julius Caesar. "Fate declared against him and his army, but not against his race,"¹ for the name of Ariovistus's warriors was Hermanni, which they pronounced Germani. These Germani ranked among the best representatives of the Aryan races and have remained the least contaminated of their descendants. Gobineau's race theories were quickly appreciated by Bismarck, who realised their importance in practical politics.

Chamberlain's book, *Die Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts* (1890-1891), developed further the theories of the Frenchman along psychological rather than physical lines—moral characteristics being for him a more important criterion of Germanic descent than the possession of blue eyes, blond hair and a dolichocephalic mould of head. As against Gobineau, for whom the white race progressively deteriorates with cross-breeding, Chamberlain claims to formulate the laws whereby a race can be created and gradually improved.

¹ Gobineau : op. cit. II, p. 351.

Be that as it may, these racist doctrines were destined to have an important influence in the religious domain. From the first they stood for a very decided anti-Jewish policy, and soon developed antagonism to the Catholic religion by reason of the original Jewish roots of the Christian faith. The old Testament was not edifying or spiritual enough for the lofty notions of Germans, whose forbears were spurred to action not by selfish motives of rewards and punishments but through the sole love of duty. The Jews were not children of God but of the demon; theologians had erred in identifying the Heavenly Father, the God of Jesus Christ, with the God of the Hebrews; the teaching of Christ is in reality an Aryan protest against the Jewish spirit, which is the enemy of humanity and all true morality. Not content with rejecting the Old Testament, these race enthusiasts proceeded to lay sacrilegious hands on the New as well, following the lead of their mentor Marcion, the heresiarch of the second century. They attempt to show, among grosser errors, that Christ was not a Jew: He was born in Galilee according to Chamberlain, that "Galilee of the Gentiles," which in the eighth century B.C. experienced an infusion of Aryan blood with the Assyrian invasion. "We can discover not the least reason," he gaily asserts, "for admitting that the parents of Jesus Christ were of the Jewish race."¹

This whittling away of the Gospel was extreme enough; but a more radical conclusion was drawn by some from their pet theories of race: a reversion to paganism pure and simple, a replacing of Christianity and its mysticism by another religion more in keeping with German mentality, in which the gods of the Nordic Olympus, Wotan and Siegfried, replace the God and Christ of the Christian dispensation.

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It was perhaps inevitable that the Nazi revolution should find, for its extreme views of nationalism as well as for its

¹ Christ's true genealogy is given in St. Matthew 1, 1: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham." St. Paul similarly attests His origin from the seed of David (Rom. 1, 4). "Galilee of the Gentiles" was a border country and may have had infiltrations of Aryan blood; but Christ was not born in Galilee but in Bethlehem, the city of David, in the land of the tribe of Judah, and He was entered on the official registers as a descendant of David.

totalitarian aims, a ready ally in these race theories. They have been developed by Rosenberg in a thoroughly radical manner in his *Myth of the 20th Century*—which however, according to the Preface, is the expression of his own private views and for which the Nazi party should in no way be held responsible.

With characteristic German thoroughness Rosenberg makes a clean sweep of all past history. He writes:—

There starts to-day one of those epochs in which the history of the world will have to be written afresh. A new sense of life, which is conscious however of being rooted in the primitive past, pushes to the surface and takes form; a new view of life (*Weltanschauung*) is born and begins to demand an account of ancient forms, sacred usages, traditional values. Not merely is there question of historical interpretation, but principles themselves are involved, not in this or that special field only but through all domains of thought, not at the surface of things merely but at their very roots. The characteristic of our time is the repudiation of the limitless Absolute, that is of a value that transcends all organic forms of experience, such as the isolated ego once framed for itself and which was to bring about peacefully or otherwise a superhuman community of the souls of all. Such a purpose was once the Christianising of the world and its redemption by the Christian returning to his ideal. Another such dream was the humanising of mankind. Both ideals have been buried in the bloody chaos and the rebirth attendant on the experiences of the world-war, though both ideals particularly now find a priesthood and a following that grow ever more fanatical. But these are mere processes of congealment and not signs of a living life. A faith which has died in the soul can no more be awakened from the dead (pp. 21-22).

In place of that dead faith there rises for Rosenberg a new faith, the faith of the race, that primitive faith of the Nordic man, of whom the present day German is the heir:—

The war-dead were the victims of the catastrophe in which a worthless epoch was involved; but they are at once the martyrs and the witnesses of a new day, a new faith . . . The blood which died begins to live. In the mystic sign of that blood a new cell-formation in the German soul is proceeding apace: present and past appear suddenly in a new light, and a new mission is set the future. Its task and that of history will be no more the struggle of class against class, of dogma against dogma, but the settlement, the composition between blood and blood, race and race, people and people. And that signifies the

struggle between soul-values and soul-values . . . Soul means the race viewed from within, and inversely race is the outer view of a soul. To awaken to life the soul of the race is to recognise its supreme place in the scale of values and to assign to other values their organic position under its supremacy in state, art, religion. That is the task of our century : to create a new type of man from out a new myth of life (p. 1).

That is the bold task which Nazi Germany has set itself : to create, in the language of Rosenberg, a new outlook and philosophy of life, based on a racist faith which rejects all traditional values and subordinates all to itself. National socialism, such as it prevails to-day in Germany, is before all else a new *Weltanschauung* ; it would confront the so-called decaying world with a complete rejuvenescence, and, while saddling Christianity with the onus of all the crises and catastrophes of the past, it proclaims as the only salvation the breaking forth of the national soul and its hidden forces. Race and a concept of life proper to itself are to be the dynamic for a new Germany and a new Europe—and a new world.

Mythus is the label attached by Rosenberg to this new twentieth century ideal. What meaning does the term convey to us ? Myths are those legends and fables, those figures under which imaginative peoples of old thought of their gods and legendary heroes, or clothed in poetic garb their reactions to the mysteries of life. In a modern poetic sense the German word *Mythus* seems to stand besides for some supreme idea (like that of race, life, honour) which can be formed as it were instinctively and which dominates man's volitional life.¹ "No people can live without a *Mythus*," writes a German biographer of Hitler,² and he seems to mean by it some figurative abstraction which embodies the conscious aspirations of a nation. For neo-pagans like Rosenberg and the supporters of the national church movement a *Mythus* is one of those imaginative creations which they have substituted for the religious truths of Christianity : for instance, Myth of the "consciousness of God in man," Myth of the "eternal race-

¹ *Mythus* is defined in the *Herderlexicon* as : "Die Form bildhafter Betrachtung des Lebens und der es beherrschenden uebermaechtigen Kraefte" (the form in which life and its supreme governing forces can be figuratively considered).

² Johann von Leers : *Adolf Hitler* (Leipzig. 1932. p. 7).

soul," Myth of "the sacred blood of the German race"—which latter is for Rosenberg *The Myth of the 20th Century*.

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From Chamberlain Rosenberg takes over the twin division of races: the good race, the Nordic, to which he ascribes all that is noble, progressive and heroic; and the degenerate race or conglomeration of races, that chaos of peoples (Voelkerchaos) from which all that is evil and degenerate proceeds.

In picturesque and imaginative pages Rosenberg traces to his own satisfaction the pre-historic origins of the Nordic race, that white-skinned, blue-eyed, blond-haired people: for him the legend of Atlantis has a basis of fact in a continent at the north-pole, between North America and Europe, a zone which then enjoyed a far milder climate and which was "the pre-historic Nordic centre of civilisation," "the central point of the world" whence these Atlantic men went forth faring by sea in their swan-and-dragon-shaped ships to the Mediterranean and North Africa, by land to Central Asia, to Kutscha, perhaps to China, and over to North America. We see them in the bright-skinned and the blue-eyed men on reliefs dating from 2,400 B.C., in Pausanias's blond Libyans, represented among the four races of Egypt on funeral monuments of Thebes; we glimpse them as "a purely Nordic type" on tombs of the eighteenth dynasty, etc., etc. The Amorites, recognised by Sayce as bright-skinned and blue-eyed, founded Jerusalem and formed the Nordic stratum in the later Galilee, "Galilee of the Gentiles," from which Christ was to proceed. For Rosenberg one great fact emerges—namely, "the sense of world-history radiating from the north spread over the whole earth, carried by a blue-eyed blond race, which in several great waves determined the spiritual face of the world." (p. 28). He enumerates these great migratory waves as follows: the march of the Atlantic men, shrouded in sagas, over North Africa; that of the Aryans to Persia and India, followed by the Dorians, Macedonians and Latins; the migration of the Germanic peoples; the colonising of the world by the Germanised West.

He then traces the influence of these waves of Nordic blood on the Indians, the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. The dream of the Nordic man was fairest dreamt in Hellas, with its poetry and religion of light (Apollo). The Zeus-Apollo represents the intellectual-volitional side of Nordic Greek blood; just as the debased bastard orgiastic types of worship, with their ecstatic rites and temple prostitution, are the expression of non-Nordic, Asiatic and North-African race-groups. For in opposition to the Nordic race there is the mixed group of races, called by Rosenberg the Pelasgian-Phoenician-Alpine-Syrian or the Africo-Asiatic chaos of peoples, that Mediterranean Morass or mixture of peoples (Voelkermorast) from which comes all that is bad and destructive of nationhood, personality and the spirit of man: magic, witchcraft, devil-worship, ecstatic religiosity, pederasty, sex-collectivism, and the rest of the evil brood, with their representatives Ahasver, Mephistopheles, the Jewish daemon, the temple-prostitute, the priest-magician and the Etruscan haruspex—the immediate successor of the last being the head of the Roman Church. As to Rome, it too was a foundation of Nordic peoples, who long before the time of the Germans and Gauls poured down on the fertile valley south of the Alps, broke the empire of the Etruscans (that strange mysterious people from Asia), mingled with the still pure breeds of the Mediterranean race, and produced a Nordic type of great strength and tenacity. But as in Greece and elsewhere, so too in Rome race-degeneration set in, the first step towards chaos being the inter-marriage of patrician and plebeian. In vain “the blue-eyed powerful Sulla” and Augustus “of the purely Nordic head” stemmed the tide of degeneracy. In 400 years of race-destroying democracy the grand racial forces of the Rome of other days were well-nigh extinct. Spaniards like Trajan, Hadrian, Aurelian only increased the degeneration: the latter Emperor was further “weakened by Christianity, for he set up as a state principle the protection of slaves, the emancipation of women, the succour of the indigent.” And so by degrees the inferior races—Asiatic, Syrian, African, Greek—bastardised the Roman people: the

Etruscan haruspex triumphed, and the Roman Pope arose as his immediate successor, while the temple rulers, the College of Cardinals, represent an amalgam of Etrusco-Syrian-Asiatic-Jewish priesthood with the Nordic senate of Rome (p. 67). To this Etruscan haruspex is traced our medieval philosophy of life, that fearful magic and witch-madness to which millions of victims were sacrificed in the West. Dante's *Inferno* is ascribed to this Etruscan world of ideas, which passed to the Roman Church.¹ "Only when this foreign thing is recognised, and its origins laid bare, and we react strongly in ridding ourselves of the whole of this fearsome spectre (*Spukwesen*), only then have we triumphed over the Middle Ages; thereby too shall we have dealt a mortal blow to the Roman Church, which has been forever bound up with Etruscan torments of the underworld."

The Christian doctrine of original sin, Rosenberg goes on to say, and the necessity of grace make explicable the victory of Christianity; but for a Nordic nation the doctrine of original sin is quite meaningless: in such a nation abides a secure confidence in itself and its own purpose. Of such a mould were the heroes of Homer, the old-time Indians, the Germani of Tacitus² and of the Dietrich saga; whereas an abiding consciousness of sin is the accompaniment of physical degeneration. Race pollution creates broken characters, a lack of direction in thought and action, an inner restlessness, a longing after grace as the only hope. So in early Christian Rome all who possessed character defended themselves against the invasion of Christianity, "even as the Germanic world has ever revolted against this Syrian thing."

Besides embodying a doctrine, this early Christianity manifested a political current which explains the persecution the Christians had to sustain. A paltry eighty martyrs suffered in the "fearful" Diocletian persecution, whereas in the Netherlands alone under the most Christian Alba

¹ Op. cit. p. 69. Dante in another place is claimed as a product of the German race, as a great Nordic Italian, whose ideal of beauty "ist germanisch bedingt" (p. 295).

² To what purpose if not to placate their gods and to satisfy for sin did the primitive Germans of Tacitus' day offer human sacrifice to Ziu the god of war? (Tacitus, *Germania* ch. 39).

100,000 heretics were put to death. Rosenberg defends the honour of Julian the Apostate, "the pious Julian" who wrote: "Through the folly of these Galileans our State has almost perished; through the grace of the gods comes now salvation: so we shall honour the gods and every city in which piety is still found."

What is Rosenberg's attitude to the Founder of Christianity? In several passages of his work he speaks of "the great personality" of Christ, which he endeavours to rescue from the mass of Asiatic-Jewish-African accretions which came to disfigure it soon after His death. All that he achieves, however, is to rob Christ of His divinity, His virgin birth, His messianic claims and His resurrection from the dead. Having thus dethroned Him, he sets Him up again as a Nordic hero of non-Jewish Aryan origin:—

It was in the interests of the Roman Church to represent lowly humility as Christ's nature, that it might have as many submissive servants as possible after this ideal. To rectify this presentation is a further indispensable demand of the German movement of renewal . . . The formidable preacher and the wrathful one in the temple, the man who dominates and "whom they all followed," not the lamb of sacrifice of the Jewish prophecy, not the crucified one, is to-day the formative ideal which shines forth to us from out the gospels. And if it cannot shine forth from them, then the Gospels themselves are dead (p. 604).

Obsessed with his racist theories Rosenberg sees in St. Paul the fanatical Pharisee who preached an international Jewish world-revolution against the Roman Empire and smoothed the way for the chaos of races throughout the ancient world, thus bastardising, orientalising and judaising Christianity. "The struggle of the first centuries after Christ can be grasped only as a struggle of different race-souls with the manifold chaos of races, whereby the Syro-Asiatic mentality, with its superstition and magic and sensual mysteries, grouped behind it all that was chaotic, abject, broken . . . Thus was introduced to Europe a religion impregnated with a slave-beatitude complex and protected by the falsification of the great personality of Jesus" (p. 76). The Catholic Church is the receptacle for this unlovely tide of Asiatic degeneracy, which, proceeding from the eastern Mediter-

raneean, created its western centre (at Rome) with the help of magical cults, the Jewish bible and a misrepresentation of the historical Jesus (p. 245). The Church's dream is the world supremacy of the divinised Pope; its purpose is chaos of race, a raceless world-state.

All that is noble, divine and of good repute in the Church, Rosenberg drags in the mire of his *Voelkermorast*: its head the Pope, its bishops, priests, religious orders, its faithful, its sacred books, its creed and moral teaching, its sacraments, its councils, its history for the past 2,000 years. Its martyrs were but the enemies of the state, those who attacked its teaching were the real men of character, from the days of Marcion and Julian to the Waldensians, Cathari, Huguenots and the heretics of our day. Every human weakness, real or fancied, that clings to its children he exploits and blows gross; he is silent as to its grandeurs and sanctities, the imperishable renown of its heroic men and women, the distinguished line of its pontiffs, its work for the regeneration of mankind, its championing of the rights of conscience and the liberty of man in every age. Rosenberg has no sense or understanding for all this; his fanatical obsession makes him blind to historic method, to a reasoned objective study of sources, to a fair-minded presentation of facts. To prepare the way for the advance of a new religion of race, the Nordic faith, he has first to belittle and defame, if he cannot shatter in pieces, that hated rival, the Catholic Church, which stands in the way.¹ In the name of German nationality and German blood he scruples not to dishonour the ancient faith not merely of a third of the German population, the German Catholics, but of the vast majority of his countrymen, who still Christian believe in a religion revealed by God.

Though he disclaims the rôle of founder of a new religion or church and bitterly attacks in his preface to the third edition of his work those who would credit him with such,

¹ This he endeavours to do by the employment of the crudest and most unscientific methods possible, by exaggeration, misrepresentation, naive ignorance and those countless foolish errors with which the *Mythus* abounds. In a special Supplement to the *Kirchlicher Anzeiger* of the Archdiocese of Cologne, entitled *Studien zum Mythus des XX. Jahrhunderts*, a complete refutation is given of Rosenberg's more glaring misrepresentations of early Christianity and of the Church of the Middle Ages and of more recent times.

Rosenberg does adumbrate a new religion in several passages of his *Mythus*, and his volume has had enormous influence in preparing the way for the German National Church movement and its neo-pagan antics.

One of the greatest tasks of the century is to give expression to the Nordic soul in a German National Church built up on national and individual honour (p. 169). . . . "A German National Church is to-day the desire of millions, though the new longing has nowhere as yet appeared as a living deed . . . no religious genius has arisen who would live before us, by the side of existing religious types, as a new creator" (p. 599). . . . "From out the newly bourgeoning national *Mythus* spiritual forces grow in all directions: each of these can be led only by a great personality As we await yet the supreme poet of the world-war, the great dramatist of our life, the great architect and sculptor, so too we look anxiously towards the leader of the new Reich and the coming National Church, the essential points of which are already clearly outlined to-day" (p. 602). . . . "Free room will be allowed to every religious conviction, subject, however, to the condition that none may in any way hinder the national teaching. . . . Once and for all the so-called Old Testament must be abolished as a religious book. That will remove the abortive attempt of the last millennium and a half to turn us spiritually into Jews, an attempt for which we have to thank their present materialistic supremacy."

This Church, it goes without saying, will be completely subordinated to the State: "no action may be approved by the German National Church which does not first of all serve the security of the German people . . . all its ministers of religion must be pledged to the oath to guard the honour of the nation . . . the National Church will be in the service of the *Mythus* of the nation" (p. 608). Out of this new religion in a remodelled Germany will emerge a new Europe with Germany as the central power and bulwark against the South and South-East—with Germany, not Palestine, the Holy Land. Like Moses on Mount Nebo, Rosenberg has a vision of this Holy Land and closes his book with a dithyrambic prophecy of its future. It is a worthy conclusion to a book which is an extraordinary farrago of historical ignorance and racial pride. It needs no refutation; but in a further article we may give some account of the attempts to set up the National Church which he adumbrates in its pages.

JOHN J. COYNE